

sedition crimes and sentenced to extraordinarily long sentences. By now it is well documented that the condemning trial was saturated with false evidence and forced confessions, and was never intended to expose the meaning of true justice. These individuals were small tradesmen, leading a life in the ways consistent with their religion, and it is that for which they are being punished. Religious persecution can never be allowed, but when such injustices are showcased before the international community, it is our responsibility to take a stand and say that this will not be tolerated.

We have seen legal and human rights organizations worldwide affirming that this trial was in fact a sham, and that it is beyond the realm of possibility to believe that such individuals could ever have been capable of committing the crimes for which they are accused.

By staging such a mockery of justice it is apparent that Iran has no comprehension of human or civil rights, and therefore convicted no other than themselves in proving that they remain unfit to enter any exercise of the civilized world.

In a recent meeting between President Clinton and the American relatives of the convicted Iranian Jews, a promise was made to use all possible U.S. government resources to secure the freedom of these individuals. This is a promise in which I would urge President Clinton to keep as I hope my colleagues here in the House would as well.

We must remember that as we speak that there are thousands of Jews remaining in Iran, who can be subjected to identical suppression at any time. We must take a stand here and

now and say behavior such as this will not be tolerated both now and in the future.

Today, in New York the Jewish Community Relations Council and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations organized a solidarity gathering in an effort to show the world community that we will continue to fight for the rights of these individuals until justice is truly served. I would like to commend these organizations for their efforts and would like to offer assistance possible to the rectification of this atrocity.

#### CHURCH PLAN PARITY AND ENTANGLEMENT PREVENTION ACT

SPEECH OF

**HON. JOHN R. THUNE**

OF SOUTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 26, 2000*

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for S. 1309. This bill clarifies that church sponsored employer benefit plans are not subject to state insurance laws.

Because church plans are exempt from the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, they do not benefit from the explicit preemption of state insurance regulation that secular self-insured health plans enjoy. Many service providers have been reluctant to do business with church benefit programs for fear that they themselves may violate state insurance rules barring contracts with unlicensed entities. In addition, state regulators occasion-

ally raise questions about the legal status of these benefit programs. These complications have caused churches to contract with numerous service providers in order to comply with recent federal mandates on church plans.

S. 1309 remedies this problem by clarifying that church plans are not insurance companies for state law purposes. Congress has already addressed a similar problem for church sponsored employee benefit plans under federal securities laws, extending the exemptions enjoyed by secular plans and preempting state securities regulation of church plans.

Just this year, my own state of South Dakota enacted an exemption for church plans from its insurance laws—making my State the fourth state to so act. I commend the Director of Insurance, Darla Lyon, the State Legislature and the Governor for working hard to protect the health care benefits of church workers and to assist them in accessing discounted providers. South Dakota has now joined Texas, Florida and Minnesota in clarifying that church benefit plans are not insurance companies. It makes little sense to suggest that church benefit programs spend their resources to enact 46 more state exemptions. The pending bill will provide these programs the legal certainty they need in every state.

More than one million clergy, lay workers, and their families are presently being denied access to discounted service providers because of the ambiguous position of church plans under state law. S. 1309 corrects this problem.

I urge adoption of the pending bill.